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THE PAPACY IN THE ENGLISH CHURCH

There are five popular fallacies to be dismissed at the outset. The first of these is that the English Church was founded by Henry VIII.

The English Church was founded by Augustine, a Roman monk sent over by Pope Gregory I, in 597; and its organization was established by Theodore of Tarsus, consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury and sent over to England by the Pope in 668. The essential principles were never changed and its integrity and continuity have never been lost.

The second fallacy is that the English Church is a continuation of the ancient British Church.

This fallacy regards the church as a church of the land and not of the people. The connection between the British and the English socially, politically or ecclesiastically is not apparent. There was none.

Then comes the fallacy that the papacy and the English Church are two distinct and separate institutions, whose relations to each other have something foreign and antagonistic.

The English Church was, from the beginning, an integral part of the one Christian Church of the West, at whose head was the Bishop of Rome, whose ecclesiastical supremacy, as Pope of the whole Western Church, was unimpaired in England, and supported and strenuously upheld by the English Church, without doubt or question, until renounced by Henry VIII in 1534.

The fourth fallacy is that the first article of Magna Carta freed the English Church from papal domination.

Its intention and effect was to free the English Church from royal interference in its rights and liberties, especially freedom of elections, being a reissue of the first article of the Charter of Henry I in 1100 and of that of Henry II in 1154.

The last fallacy is that the English Church was strictly, solely and entirely a national Church before the Reformation, having an independent origin, constitution and government, although at times encroached upon by a foreign, *i.e.*, papal power.

National individuality, not national autonomy, made a national

Church in the Middle Ages. The Church in England is the English Church; but, at the same time, it is a part of the great Apostolic Roman Church of the West, recognizing the same General Councils, the same form of worship and doctrine, the same literary customs and usages, with one common head and centre in the Pope.

In order to minimize the importance and the effect of the changes wrought in the constitution of the English Church by Henry VIII and Elizabeth, it has long been the custom of writers of English history to underestimate or even to deny the papal headship and authority in England before the Reformation; to emphasize and even to exaggerate the opposition to papal authority; indeed, to consider the Papacy and the English Church as two distinct and separate institutions whose relations to each other are regarded, at various times and in various phases, as more or less intimate or separate or dependent and subordinate; and also to seek to find the origin of the English Church in the British Church. These attitudes lead to much misunderstanding, and to many and serious historical inaccuracies, in the effort to prove, as these writers desire, the theory of the continuity of the English Church through the great and momentous changes wrought by the Reformation in England and the ecclesiastical acts and decrees of Henry and Elizabeth. This theory was desirable at the time as a matter of policy, so as to avoid as far as possible the appearance of innovation, and to draw all classes imperceptibly into the new order. The doctrine, having served its purpose in the struggle with the followers of the old faith, was utilized in the conflict with the Presbyterians, in order to strengthen the position of episcopacy, which was represented as the legal form of government continued from pre-reformation times and rendered venerable by antiquity. Even at present this doctrine of unbroken continuity, independent of and antagonistic to the papacy, although political reasons for maintaining it have long since ceased to have weight, meets with the most general acceptance. Ignoring the merely popular writers, I present passages from the works of three recognized and well-established scholars and historians. The first of these

occurs in *England and Rome*, by Dr. T. Dunbar Ingram, a London barrister:—

“There is no fact in our history more certain than that from the earliest period of our monarchy, our kings exercised a large supremacy over the external regimen and adjuncts of the Church, differing *in no respects* from that which Henry enjoyed.”¹

Yet Makower, a Berlin barrister, in his *Constitutional History of the Church of England*, declares:—

“The real changes which ensued [from the Reformation] relate almost exclusively to the connection of the national Church with the Pope; they consist in the complete abolition of all papal authority in England, and in the transference of almost all rights of government previously exercised by the Pope, to the English Sovereign.”²

And this statement is historically accurate.

In Wakeman's *History of the Church of England* we read: “There never was in any true sense of the word, a papal church in England”. If not, then there was never any papal church anywhere, except in Italy. Indeed, there was never anything else in England, for after 700 A.D. no other Church was known in Europe. “But”, he continues,—

“for nine hundred years there had been planted in England the Catholic Church of Christ, over which during the last four hundred years the popes had gradually acquired certain administrative rights.”³

This is just what they did everywhere, for the increasing power of the popes in England does not make a subserviency to the papacy peculiar to England, but the increasing assertion and exercise of papal power are a part of the history of the papacy throughout Europe.

Bishop Creighton tells us in his *Historical Lectures and Addresses*:—

“There never was a time in England when the papal authority was not resented, and, really, the final act of the repudiation of that authority followed quite naturally as the

¹ P. vii.

² P. 176.

³ P. 220.

result of a long series of similar acts which had taken place from the earliest times."⁴

Upon this statement Gairdner, who quotes it in his *Lollardy and the Reformation in England*, comments as follows:—

"I am sorry to differ from so able, conscientious and learned an historian, and my difficulty in contradicting him is increased by the consciousness that in these passages he expresses not his own opinion merely, but one to which Protestant writers have been generally predisposed. But can such statements be justified? Was there anything like a general dislike of the Roman jurisdiction in Church matters before Roman jurisdiction was abolished by Parliament to please Henry VIII? Or did the nation, before that day, believe that it would be more independent if the Pope's jurisdiction were replaced by the King's? I fail, I must say, to see any evidence of such a feeling in the copious correspondence of the twenty years preceding. It would be difficult to infer anything like a general desire for the abolition of his [papal] authority in England. That Rome exercised her spiritual power by the willing obedience of Englishmen in general, and that they regarded it as a really wholesome power, even for the control it had exercised over secular tyranny, is a fact which requires no very intimate knowledge of early English literature to bring home to us. Who was 'the holy blisful martyr' whom Chaucer's pilgrims went to seek at Canterbury? One who had resisted his sovereign in the attempt to interfere with the claims of the papal church. The struggle between papal and secular authority was a contest, not of the English people, but of the King and his government with Rome, and even they did not deny the papal headship of the church."⁵

We may add, still less was it a struggle between English Churchmen and the Pope. The instances of even the slightest indifference, not to say opposition to the claims of the Pope at any time in English history from the archbishopric of Augustine to that of Cranmer, might be counted on the fingers of one hand without using the thumb.

The latest *Manual of English Church History* is by W. M. Patterson, of Oxford, published in London in 1909. Patterson says:—

⁴ P. 150.

⁵ Vol I, p. 3.

"There was a theory, popular some little time ago and backed by the authority of great names, which maintained that the Church of England during the Middle Ages was, relatively speaking, an antipapal church. But this theory in the light of fuller (and we may add less prejudiced) investigation must be altogether discarded. The mediæval Church of England was *papalissima*. And Professor Maitland has shown, in his work on Canon Law, that any provincial canon of the English Church, if contrary to a canon of the Universal Church, was, *ipso facto*, in the English Ecclesiastical Courts, regarded as void. The attempts by Acts of Provisors and *Præmunire* to limit the papal power, were acts, not of the English Church, but of the English State, taken in defiance of the accredited organs of the Church—that is, the Convocations of Canterbury and York and the parliamentary bench of bishops. The mediæval Church of England was assuredly not national in the sense of antipapal."⁶

What is meant by the phrase National Church? If it means confined to, and comprehended by, the nation, and governed solely and exclusively by the authority of the nation, it is false and misleading before 1534 A.D. In this sense the National Church of England did begin with Henry VIII. If it means that part of the Church which is in union with other parts of the Church and under the authority of the whole Church, or of any large independent portion, and yet at the same time includes the people of a single nation, and has the lower and subordinate parts of its organization within the limits of a single nation, partaking of the spirit and characteristics and acknowledging the authority of that nation, then we may speak of it as a National Church. There can be no doubt that the organized Christianity of England was an integral part of the organized Christianity of the West, which, even before the existence of Christianity in England, had become unified under the Papacy, *i. e.*, in the papal Church. As a matter of fact, the English Church existed in a unified organized institution before the English nation so existed, but it was organized as an acknowledged integral part of the Western or Roman Church, with the papacy as its head and centre.

We may speak of the Western or Latin or Roman Church as the corporate Church of Western Europe, but it was never a confederation of National Churches. The English Church, even

⁶ P. 176.

in Anglo-Saxon times, was not merely the organized Christianity of England, but was an organic part of a much larger organization. The exact limits of its relation or subordination to the organized Christianity of the rest of Europe were possibly disputable, but the fact of incorporation with it, under the Papacy, was admitted on all sides and at all times. If the Christian organization in England differed from, or was separate from and independent of, the organized Christianity of the West, we might speak of it as a National Church, but this is just what it was not. If a National Church is the Church accepted, authorized, supported and maintained by the nation, there can be no doubt that the English Church, with its Archbishops of Canterbury and of York wearing the papal pallium and acknowledging the supremacy of the Pope, was the National Church of England.

We may find a few instances of opposition to certain decisions or decrees of a Pope, but these were not based on a refusal to recognize papal supremacy and authority, but were due to the belief that that authority had been misapplied or exceeded. It must be remembered that although the principle and foundation of the papacy was that Rome was the See of St. Peter, the chief of the Apostles, commissioned by Christ, receiving from him the authority which St. Peter passed on to his successors, the Bishops of Rome, yet the actual powers claimed, and, above all, exercised under that commission, varied at different times, under different circumstances and in different popes; but there is *no instance* in the Western Church where that principle was disputed or denied by King or Bishop until the Reformation.

As the papacy grew, it grew not apart from but in the whole Western Church, and, whatever resistance might be made to some of its demands, the principles of its authority were never questioned, and it early became an integral part of the consciousness and experience of the entire Western Church. Opposition to this growing power of the papacy and to the consequent widespreading, unified organization of the Church, is found among civil rulers, but rarely among ecclesiastical officials. Why? Partly, it is true, on account of the encroachments of the ecclesiastical upon the civil power; partly because of the foreign, extra-national character of the Church under the pap-

acy; and partly because that very characteristic was a bulwark and a defence for the Church against the State, and protected the Church from exploitation by the State. That is the real meaning of the first article of Magna Carta. There could be no real opposition on the part of the Church, not only on account of the positive advantages accruing to the Church from the papacy—which was its own creation—as a guarantee of unity and orthodoxy, and as a means of growth and of strength, but also because the papal supremacy had become an article of faith as firmly fixed as the belief in Apostolic Succession, indeed had come to be the Apostolic Succession. Take, for example, the declaration of Beda, the struggle between Anselm and Henry I and between Thomas Becket and Henry II—a struggle not between the English Church and the papacy, but between the State and the Church, revealing in each case the backing of authority with which Rome strengthened the English Church. The only cases of opposition to papal authority on the part of Churchmen of which I know, were that of Theodore in the case of Wilfrid; that of Dunstan in the case of the divorced noble; that of Lanfranc in the interest of William the Conqueror (yet Hildebrand in the first year told him that he was astounded at his audacity in neglecting papal orders); and that of Stephen Langton when Innocent III was upholding John's perfidy and the breach of his oath in relation to Magna Carta. There is no Hincmar in English history. It was Henry the King, not the Archbishop of Canterbury, who threw off the papal authority in 1534, and himself assumed that power in taking the title and office of Supreme Head of the Church.

The papacy is of historical origin, by ecclesiastical, not by divine, right. It was not a violation of divine law to break the bonds of the Holy Roman Empire and let the nations of Europe emerge into national integrity and independence. Nor was it more of a violation to break the bonds of a corrupt and enslaving papacy and let the national churches breathe the pure air of a free and autonomous Christianity in the State. Henry VIII did not reform the English Church, still less was he the founder of the English Church. He did suppress the monasteries—the papal army in England—and confiscate their property, and he

did abolish all papal power in England. If the papacy was an integral, but not an essential, part of the English Church, then Henry VIII changed its character, but did not destroy its identity. As Wakeman has well said:—

“There is one theory, and one theory only, on which the Church of England can be said to have fallen from the Catholic faith in her repudiation of the authority of the Pope. It is the modern ultramontane theory of the papacy which looks upon the Pope as the source—*i. e.*, the only source—of all true ecclesiastical authority. No archbishop or bishop has, according to this theory, rightful jurisdiction unless he exercises it under the direction of the Pope. It is obvious that if this theory is true, the Church of England, which proceeded avowedly on the exactly opposite theory, must fall. But this theory is one which was unknown in the primitive ages, and was unrecognized by the undivided Church.”⁷

The papacy, or at any rate the power claimed and exercised by the popes, was a growth, and it grew in England in the same way that it grew in every other part of the Western Church. For the Western Church was practically, and increasingly, papal, that is, organized and centralized in relation to Rome, and more and more it effectually acknowledged the authority of the Bishop of Rome as the head and governor of the organization.

The gradual growth and exercise of the papal power form an important element in this study. During the early part of the Anglo-Saxon period that power was slowly rising to the height which it attained during the three popes succeeding the break-up of the Carolingian Empire—858 to 882; then came a period of sharp decline and great demoralization, lasting, with only one brief interval of reform, until Henry III, the Emperor of the newly founded Holy Roman Empire, called the Synod of Sutri, in 1046, to straighten out papal affairs, soon after which began the era of Hildebrandine reform. This era of greatly increasing power, politically as well as ecclesiastically, beginning about the time of the Norman Conquest, reached its height in Innocent III—1198 to 1216—just at the time of the reign of John and the signing of Magna Carta in England. The papacy retained its power throughout the thirteenth century, during the reign of Henry III and of

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 221.

Edward I, and reached the climax of its claims in Boniface VIII—1294 to 1303; then began its fall, although it still retained its ecclesiastical supremacy and much of its political power.

The period of the French exile—1309 to 1378—was followed by the long schism from 1378 to 1417, when two complete rival papal establishments, one at Rome and the other at Avignon, anathematized each other and competed for the support of the Christian nations of Europe. France and Scotland upheld the French Pope, while England and Germany acknowledged their allegiance to the Italian papacy, once more established in Rome.

The three Reforming Councils of the early part of the fifteenth century brought about the unity of the papacy and restored in some measure its earlier greatness and power, but the outrageous immorality and indecency of the three popes from 1471 to 1503, followed by the warlike greed of Julius II and the Christianized heathenism and refined intellectual sensualism of Leo X, left the papacy helpless and defenceless before the profound piety and deep Christian spirit of Luther; then the papacy fell, its moral power dissipated and evaporated, its political power overthrown, and its ecclesiastical power shattered.

It will conduce to clearness and will help us to understand the real basis and extent of the exercise of the papal power in England, if we sum up briefly the historical evidences of the recognition of papal supremacy in the English Church.

(1) Roman origin of the Church in England and its unbroken continuity from that origin.

(2) Complete and close unity with the rest of the Christian Church of the West, under the headship of Rome and the papal supremacy of the Bishop of Rome.

(3) The regular and invariable reception of the Pallium from the Pope, by the Archbishop of Canterbury (usually going to Rome for it, unless relieved by special dispensation), from the time of Augustine, the first Archbishop, to Cranmer, the last who received the customary bulls of Rome and took the regular oath of allegiance to the Pope in order to guarantee his valid consecration to the See of Canterbury.⁸

⁸ We read in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 995: "Abp. Ælfric went to Rome for the pall and returned to do all the Pope commanded him."

(4) The long list of appeals to the Roman Curia from the English Church, the papal Decretals in answer to them being received with even more reverence and with greater frequency in England than in either France or Germany. Even after the Constitutions of Clarendon, which Henry II attempted to impose upon the Church in 1164, the general right to make appeals in certain cases, especially in ecclesiastical cases, even without the King's license, was no longer disputed.

(5) The Papal Legates form as important a part of English Church history as of any branch of the Church in other countries. During the Anglo-Saxon period, indeed, these legations were less frequent than in the later history (although even here there are six or eight recorded by the chroniclers), mainly because there seemed to be less need of them and because they were only beginning to become a part of the papal machinery of ecclesiastical administration. As a matter of fact, they were sent sometimes at the King's express desire, and sometimes, for other causes, without consulting the King. It has been said that Guido, Archbishop of Vienna, who, in 1100, came to England with legatine powers, was not acknowledged there, but Eadmer, who records the fact in his *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, adds that it was not because he was a papal legate but because only the Archbishop of Canterbury bore the apostolic authority as *legatus natus*. In the year 1126 William, Archbishop of Canterbury, took the position of a papal legate, his successors for the most part filling the same office, and from the thirteenth century they received the same position as soon as their election was recognized at Rome. Even before 1126 the Archbishops of Canterbury claimed the position of papal legates, and after that date the distinction between the authority which they exercised in their own archiepiscopal right, and that which they derived from the Pope as his legate was gradually effaced. From the middle of the fourteenth century, and in several cases before that time, the archbishops of York also were almost always papal legates.

(6) Papal Bulls. In most continental countries, from the end of the thirteenth century, it came to be the rule that the validity of measures consequent on papal decrees depended on their approval by the civil power. But this was a measure of

defence by the civil power, not an assertion by the Church of any independence of, or resistance to, the papal power.

(7) The acceptance in the English Church of the decrees of General Councils, and of the body of canons, as approved and formulated at Rome. It used to be maintained that the English Church in its convocations felt itself free to pick and choose among the canons of the Western Church, that is, to choose one and reject another; that in the English ecclesiastical courts the law administered was simply those canons which had been accepted by the English Church. This view must now be discarded. Professor Maitland has shown that an undue proportion of the canon law was formed from papal rescripts, delivered in answer to cases, real or imaginary, which were referred from England to the Pope, and that any provincial canon of the English Church, if contrary to a canon of the Universal Church, was, *ipso facto*, regarded as void in the English ecclesiastical courts. In the sphere of jurisprudence the Pope was regarded as the source of ecclesiastical law and its supreme interpreter; in all matters pertaining to the Church, including wills and marriages, the papal jurisdiction was supreme, except in so far as the operation of the ecclesiastical law was impeded by the law of the land. William's ordinance of 1070 A.D., withdrawing from the secular courts all ecclesiastical cases, leaving all such to the ecclesiastical authorities, admitted the validity of canon law, and recognized to that extent an independent and ecclesiastical power which formed a firm basis for the Church in all future contentions with the State.

(8) In the sphere of taxation, the Pope received from England Peter's Pence, instituted perhaps in the eighth century, as a tax of one penny on each hearth, later commuted to an annual tribute of 201 pounds and nine shillings, which continued to be paid up to the Reformation; and also King John's tribute of 1,000 marks yearly, paid up to 1333 and abolished only in 1366. Besides, there were fees payable in papal courts, *annates* or first year's income, provisors and other fees from bishoprics and benefices, and sometimes voluntary or assessed grants from the clergy as a whole. In the opposition to King Edward's attempt to tax the clergy for his French wars in 1296, after

Boniface's Bull '*Clericis laicos*', the Pope and with him the English clergy adhered to the view that papal consent was requisite for every tax upon church property.

(9) The papal appointments to bishoprics began early, although made usually under some pretext, *e. g.*, the death of the previous Bishop in Rome. A decree of Clement IV in 1266 claimed '*plenaria dispositio*' of all bishoprics and benefices throughout the whole Church, and in the fourteenth century direct appointment of bishops became common. After the passing of the Statute of Provisors, first in 1351 but frequently reënacted, this large exercise of power was held in check, although the statute was often nullified by collusion between King and Pope, sometimes at the King's own request, in order to escape the opposition of the Cathedral Chapter. Most appointments after the fourteenth century were made conjointly, Pope and King appointing the same person, while the rights of the Chapters were reduced to a mere shadow. In spite of statutes the Pope still retained, in practice, the power of providing to some of the lower benefices, prebends and others.

(10) The elevation of the Bishopric of York to the rank and title of an Archbishopric in 735, Egbert being the first Bishop of York to receive the Pallium and bulls from the Pope constituting him an Archbishop, testified to the necessity of papal action in every important development of the English Church.

The Council of Clovesho in 747 received letters from Pope Zachariah exhorting the clergy to amend their lives. Papal legates at the Council of Chelsea in 787 brought the constitutions and canons from Rome, and privileges conferred by the Roman See on certain English Churches were ordered to be observed.

The Pope had to be consulted and his authorization secured for the elevation of Lichfield into an archbishopric. This was done at the expense of Canterbury, the Archbishop being forced by Hadrian I to relinquish the Mercian and East Anglian portions of his province to form the new Archiepiscopal See, and this action was confirmed at the Council of Chelsea, on which occasion Offa promised an annual tribute to Rome, the probable origin of Peter's Pence, or Rome-scot. English Bishops

took part in the Council of Frankfort in 794, which finally freed Rome from Constantinople and definitely affirmed the independent establishment of the Church of the West under the headship of the Bishop of Rome. By the Bull of Leo III at the Council of Clovesho in 803, the Archbishopric of Lichfield was abolished and the province restored to Canterbury. The missionary activity of Boniface and the oath by which he bound himself and the English Missions in Germany to the Papal See, are an illustration of the allegiance in England, in the eighth century, to the papal power.

We may conclude in the words of Makower:—

“From the end of the twelfth century at latest, down to the Reformation, no claim was ever made by any King or in any resolution of Parliament, that England was, in purely ecclesiastical matters, independent of the Pope. Such a contention would have been in too striking conflict with the actual circumstances of the case. Many of the resolutions frequently adduced as instances of such resolutions of independence, prove what they are not cited to prove, for they confine the independence claimed to temporal or royal rights; in others, this limitation is to be supplied, as being, beyond all doubt, intended. All these resolutions are merely in repudiation of papal pretensions to decide in questions of patronage, to enjoy Suzerainty, and to exercise powers deduced therefrom.”⁹

As a matter of fact, the rule in England was divided between the Pope and the King. So Bracton, who wrote the great work, *On the Laws of England*, in the middle of the thirteenth century, clearly states:—

“As the Lord Pope has ordinary jurisdiction over all in spiritual things; so has the King in his realm ordinary jurisprudence in temporal affairs.”¹⁰

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⁹ *Op cit.*, p. 251.

¹⁰ Book v, chapter xv, section 2.